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ABSTRACT

One effective way schools can involve family members in the important process of motivating children to read is with a family reading night. This kit is designed to streamline the process of implementing a family reading night in schools. The kit begins with success stories from several schools using family reading nights. It then presents the definition of "family reading night," suggestions on staffing, tips on funding/sponsorships, and suggestions for announcements. Also included are models of a planning checklist for teachers and administrators to adapt, samples of a letter to send home to parents, and a news release to submit to local media. The kit asserts that the family reading night concept has been received positively around the country, providing not only an opportunity for reading practice and the chance to draw parents and students closer together, but also bringing increased attention to teaching efforts and the positive resources of the school. (EV)

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# FAMILY READING NIGHT

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## A "How-to" Kit

By Judi Paul, Creator of the Accelerated Reader

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A D V A N T A G E

Learning Systems, Inc.

Dear Educator,

Twelve years ago, I was searching for a way to motivate my children to spend more time reading. Nothing I tried was very successful until 1984, when I developed a different kind of summer reading program for them. That reading program evolved into the Accelerated Reader, a computerized reading management program now used by over 23,000 schools nationwide.

Today educators struggle more than ever with motivating children to read. If the family doesn't support them in this area, the job can be almost impossible. One very effective way to involve family members and other parents or other responsible adults in this important process is **Family Reading Night**. I learned about **Family Reading Night** while talking with Title I Teacher Linda Milam from Stoughton, Wisconsin. I was so impressed with what she was doing that I wanted to share it with as many other educators as possible. That's why I created this **Family Reading Night Kit**.

Here's the opportunity to have your students bring a parent, guardian, or other important adult person to school for a fun and sociable experience. Parents who typically avoid the school and parent-teacher conferences should feel at ease because school "problems" are not discussed. **Family Reading Night** is flexible and nonthreatening. The only rule is that kids must be accompanied by a family member or an adult. Kids and parents come when they can, and stay for as little or as much time as they want. Of course, the goal is to have them come weekly, and that's where your creative ideas can shine. There are some suggestions in this kit, and we hope you'll share any of your ideas with us so others can gain from your experiences.

There are many benefits to **Family Reading Night**. It is effective with all students regardless of their ability level. Parents who have avoided school in the past have a reason to enjoy coming to school. You'll bring community-wide attention to your teaching efforts and to the positive role of the school in the community. And you'll bring families together to share quality time, away from the world of work and worries.

Sincerely,

Judi

P. S. **Family Reading Night** doesn't require the Accelerated Reader, though AR makes it more effective and more fun. Advantage Learning Systems encourages **Family Reading Night** because we support educators in building communities of readers. See the back page for more free tools to improve literacy in your school.

# Introduction

Schools throughout the United States have begun devoting a family night to reading. The goal: To bring families together away from work and worries to have fun together.

Here's your chance to foster a family reading environment. In many families, leisure time is at a premium, and the importance of reading often gets lost in the shuffle. Providing families with the chance to attend a regular reading event is a very worthwhile and manageable project. Best of all, it doesn't take a lot of work! This kit is designed to streamline the process for you.

In the next few pages, you'll read success stories from several Accelerated Reader schools. You'll also find:

- ➜ Definition of **Family Reading Night**
- ➜ Suggestions on staffing
- ➜ Tips on funding/sponsorships
- ➜ Suggestions on announcements

You'll also find models of a planning checklist for you to adapt, samples of a letter to send home to parents, and a news release to submit to your local media — all of which you may use when drafting your own communications.

The **Family Reading Night** concept has been received positively around the country. Besides providing an opportunity for reading practice and the chance to draw parents and students closer together, there are other benefits: You'll bring increased attention to your teaching efforts and the positive resources of the school. Your community will see that the caring school environment doesn't stop at the end of the school day.

Make **Family Reading Night** a reality in your community — a little effort can yield great rewards.

# Success Stories

## Family Reading Night a hit in Wisconsin school

Last year marked the beginning of what's hoped to become a tradition at Fox Prairie Elementary, Stoughton, WI. Title I Teacher Linda Milam instituted a **Family Reading Night**, thanks to a grant from Chrysler Corporation (which paid for an aide), and others at the school.

Every Wednesday night from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m., Title I students bring family members to the school to read books and take Accelerated Reader tests. Each family creates their own competition. Some read the same books; others read different books and share their thoughts on them. The students test under their own names, and any family members test under the family name.

It is preferable but not necessary to come every week. The idea is to get everyone reading and doing an activity together. One mother of five especially enjoys **Family Reading Night**, according to Milam. This gives her an opportunity to spend some one-on-one time with her son, a treat not often possible in their hectic household.

*(Excerpted from November 1995 issue of* ***AR User Notes*** *newsletter)*

## "Support of Family Reading" draws families together

Theme nights are credited with bringing out students and parents throughout the year at Coltrane-Webb Elementary School, Concord, NC. One month, "Snuggle Up With SFR" brought readers to school in bedroom slippers. Hot chocolate and donuts rounded out the evening as everyone snuggled up with a

good book and comfort food. December brought with it "Happy Holiday Reading," complete with a visit from Santa and a presentation of a song that the students wrote for their parents.

Weslyn White, who piloted the program, credits the relaxed atmosphere with the success of "Support of Family Reading." Parents don't feel threatened coming to a place where they can kick back and spend some quality time with their children and improve their own reading at the same time. Families bond while discussing and recommending books among themselves and with other families.
*(Excerpted from December 1995 issue of* ***AR User Notes*** *newsletter)*

## *Family Reading Night encourages primary grades togetherness*

One conscientious Muscatine, IA, librarian has hosted a monthly **Family Reading Night** for more than five years. Coincidentally, that's the same year the school began using the Accelerated Reader.

One factor in the success of Grant Elementary's **Family Reading Night** is the physical layout of the library. It has a separate door that opens to the outside, so participants do not have to pass through school corridors. That easier access reduced administrators' concern about potential security problems.

To help set up her program, Librarian Gwen Hansen purchased a second set of library cards. "Now when a book comes back with a yellow card in the pocket, I know it came from the night-time group," Hansen said. "I do not limit the number of books these families can take; and in all these years, I've never been disappointed by books not being returned," she added.

Hansen can usually count on 40-50 participants a night. Some cold winter nights, she said, they may get as few as 20. "It's usually the kindergarten, first-, and second-grade families who come; they get excited about the program and about reading. Recently I've noticed more third- and fourth-graders. I think that's because they've grown up with the program," Hansen said. Students are encouraged to take Accelerated Reader tests in the evening.

# An Overview

### *Definition*

**Family Reading Night** should not be a lot of work for you or your staff. It's little more than throwing open the doors of the school one night a week and encouraging families to drop in to have a good time and spend some quality time with their sons and daughters, your students.

The structure of the evening is very flexible:

- The key to the program is that each student who comes must be accompanied by a parent, guardian, or other older, responsible adult.
- Encourage pairs to select books and read together. Adult and child can read the same books, or unique books. They may elect to quietly discuss their reading. Struggling readers may benefit from read-aloud practice, like Duolog™ reading or other forms of paired reading.
- Weekly attendance is best. Be creative about ways to increase participation and attendance of all students. A weekly drawing is one good technique (see page 6 for an example).
- Participants should be free to drop in for a few minutes, or stay as long as they'd like. An open, inviting atmosphere is crucial.

- Family members can test their comprehension with the Accelerated Reader reading management system. Your students will already have an account established for their reading. Set up an account in the family name for all others to test under.

- As **Family Reading Night** catches on, you might consider occasional events such as having your best storyteller read aloud a short story in the middle of the evening. Don't overlook the fact that all readers benefit from TWI time (that is, reading To, reading With, and reading Independently).

**Family Reading Night** should be an event the entire school becomes familiar with and can be proud of. Be careful that it doesn't become a time-consuming production. Keep it simple and flexible; the evening is a social event. Above all, HAVE FUN with it!

## Staffing

You should address the issue of staffing early on. **Family Reading Night** should not add to your work load. Plan on having a paid aide available to monitor the facility and use of resources. Great sources include college-age student teachers, teaching aides, high school students, or parents.

Besides your monitor, you may want to engage the talents of some student leaders who are particularly excited about reading, and are familiar with running Accelerated Reader. Explain that you'll need one or two students each week to pitch in on **Family Reading Night** to help with set-up, finding books, taking tests, printing reports, etc. Students are great volunteers. They generally follow directions, they'll work virtually for free, and they recognize they are getting great experience. Be sure to get parental permission for these students to help in your efforts.

## Funding/Sponsorship

You should talk with the principal or administration about your plans, but you can anticipate one of their first questions: What's this project going to cost? Again, it may be nothing more than opening the school for a few hours. If you feel the program would benefit, you might consider a banner, cookies, bookmarks, and so forth.

Take a few moments to make some projections:

- ➜ Staffing
- ➜ Refreshments
- ➜ Banner
- ➜ Other extras

Your budget for a weekly event might look like this:

- ➜ One aide x 2-1/2 hours = $20 per session
- ➜ Cookies, pretzels = $5 per session
- ➜ Banner (one time cost) = $50
- ➜ 30 weeks x $25 per session = $750, plus $50 banner = $800 per year.

If you've done a good job of selling the program to the principal, he or she might just find the budget for you, taking it out of general operating expenses, for example. Or he or she might submit it to your parent-teacher organization with a strong recommendation for implementation and a request for funds.

But if funds are tight, there's another alternative: Sponsorship. It's relatively easy to go outside to find a benefactor to sponsor **Family Reading Night**. In exchange for the goodwill and advertising exposure that your program offers, area business owners will be quite willing to spend a few hundred dollars over the school year to support your program. Benefits to them are having the business name seen many times by members of the community, general goodwill, positive publicity, and an alliance with two important issues, literacy and the family.

You should send letters to two or three dozen prominent area businesses. Compile the list yourself, or ask prominent community leaders such as members of your school board to lend their help. Be sure to mention to the business people that their businesses' name will appear in publicity letters, on promotional flyers, and on a sign posted during **Family Reading Nights**.

On the following page is a model of a personalized letter of appeal. It's a good idea to follow up with a phone call within a few days of sending your letters.

## *Announcement*

Once the personnel and financial requirements are fulfilled, it's time to take the wraps off! On page 6 is a short letter that can be adapted for your program to notify parents and families of **Family Reading Night**.

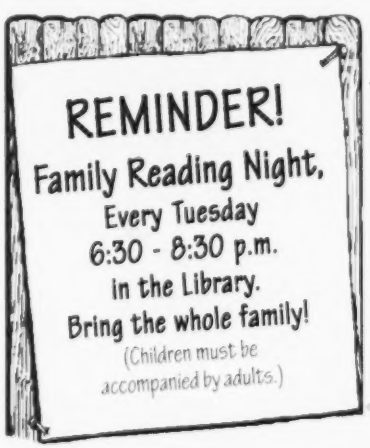
Additionally, you'll want to create some simple flyers to post around the school, reminding students of the event. Be sure to include your sponsor's name in a prominent spot.

It's also a good time to draft a news release to send to local media (see ***Appendix B***). Be sure to cite the generosity of administrators and your benefactors, if you've gotten any. Plan to follow up the news releases with a phone call to editors, reminding them of the event and suggesting it might make a good photo opportunity.

## *Family Reading Night Time Line*

Managing **Family Reading Night** will vary with the unique characteristics of your school, but this time line should prove a helpful guide for your aide's procedures. In this example, **Family Reading Night** is held from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

| | |
|---|---|
| **6:15** | Unlock appropriate doors, post signs as needed<br>Meet student staffers, if you have them<br>Turn lights on<br>Turn computers on<br>Turn printers on<br>Hang banner<br>Put out snacks, if you have them |
| **6:30** | Welcome families individually |
| **6:30-8:30** | Assist families in locating books, taking tests; monitor snack table |
| **8:20** | Make general closing announcement |
| **8:30** | Reading night concluded<br>Clean snack area and store supplies<br>Straighten tables, chairs, etc.<br>Take down banner and door signs; store until next week<br>Turn computers and printers off<br>Thank staffers for their assistance<br>Turn lights off |
| **8:45** | Lock appropriate doors; secure the building |



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## *Sample Sponsorship Solicitation Letter*

***(Type on school letterhead, personally addressed to business leaders.)***

*(Name)* *(Date)*
*(Business name)*
*(Address)*
*(City, State, Zip)*

Dear _____ ,

I'm writing to ask for a few moments of your time. As a prominent business person in our community, you regularly demonstrate your caring for the students of *(school name)*. Given your commitment to our programs, I'd like to give you a sneak preview of our latest project designed to get kids excited about reading.

It's a simple but exciting idea called **Family Reading Night**. Every Wednesday night during the school year, from 6:30 to 8:30, we'll open the school library to students and their families. All are welcome to come and select books, read to one another, or read alone. This is an opportunity for parents to spend **quality time** with their children; sharing interests, discussing books, taking some time together out of their busy work week. The **Family Reading Night** program has proven successful in other schools throughout the nation, and I'm sure it will be an important addition to our community.

Would you please consider sponsoring **Family Reading Night**? Our expenses will be minimal: We'll need to compensate an aide for supervising the library and computers for two and a half hours each week. It would also be nice to have occasional snacks and sweet treats. In return for your support, the (*business*) name would appear on a **Family Reading Night** banner, displayed throughout the year. It would also appear on flyers distributed in the community. We would issue a press release to the local media regarding **Family Reading Night**, giving prominent mention to you, one of our benefactors. All told, this promotional opportunity would offer a year-long visible presence for less than the cost of most print advertising.

If you're committed to making a difference in the community, would you please call me to discuss sponsoring **Family Reading Night**?

Sincerely,

*(Your name)*

P. S. If you have any suggestions on developing **Family Reading Night**, please call me. I'd welcome your opinion.



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***(Type on school letterhead, to inform parents about Family Reading Night.)***

*(Date)*

Dear Parents,

We're kicking off a new after-hours program called **Family Reading Night**. It's an opportunity for you and your children to come to the school one night a week to read, together or alone, and to talk about books. Perhaps more importantly, it's a chance to have fun and invest some **quality time** in your children, and in their education here at *(school name)*.

**Family Reading Night** is every Wednesday night from 6:30 to 8:30 in the school library, starting *(proposed start date)*. You need not commit to every week, and you are welcome to come and go on your own time schedule. A teacher's aide and students will be on hand to help you find books and, if you'd like, to take computerized tests with the Accelerated Reader program.

I'd also like to thank *(list principal, librarian, or other faculty member)* for their support, and acknowledge *(benefactor)* for sponsoring **Family Reading Night** by helping satisfy necessary expenses.

When you demonstrate that reading is an important activity in your life, it goes a long way to instilling a love of reading in your child. Please plan to drop in on **Family Reading Night**!

Sincerely,

*(Your name)*

P. S. Each child must be accompanied by an adult. Attendance by child with an adult qualifies him or her to earn a chance in our weekly drawing to be the first in line at lunch for a week (or whatever incentive you'd like to offer). We'll also have coupons from *(business)* for adults. See you there!

# Planning Checklist

**Definition**

- ❒ Open access to library
- ❒ Flexible structure
- ❒ Challenges: Parent-student, family-family, principal-participants
- ❒ Testing on Accelerated Reader computers

**Participants**

- ❒ Students
- ❒ Parents

**Staffing**

- ❒ Aide
- ❒ Several "Students With Aptitude for Tutoring" (SWAT) (optional)

**Budget**

- ❒ Cost of aide
- ❒ Cost for facility/utilities, if any
- ❒ Snacks (optional)

**Sponsorship**

- ❒ Benefactor
- ❒ PTO
- ❒ Operating budget

**Announcement**

- ❒ Letter to parents
- ❒ Flyers around school
- ❒ News release to media

**Premiere Family Reading Night**

# Sample Press Release

Submit the following press release to your local news media to let them know about your **Family Reading Night**. Just retype on school letterhead, filling in the blanks, and send it off. Include some interesting photos of children reading or posing with stacks of books. The publicity you'll receive will be well worth the effort. It may even generate community support of your **Family Reading Night**!

## *(School name)* Invites Families to Read Together

Every *(state what night you hold your **Family Reading Night** get-together)* evening, students and their families gather at the *(name of your school)* library to share some special reading time. Parents, grandparents, and siblings gather informally to select books, talk about what they've read and what they recommend, and prove their understanding with computerized testing. Snacking is optional, as is friendly competition among family members. The key is that families have fun and spend quality time together in an activity that promotes good reading habits.

"**Family Reading Nights** like this one are catching on throughout the country," said *(your name)*, *(title)* at *(name of your school)*, who oversees reading night activities from *(time; i.e., 6:30 to 8:30 on Wednesdays)*. "In our rush-rush society, it's important that parents and busy children take time for an activity that is fun and promotes togetherness. Practicing reading skills is a natural."

Aside from the fellowship, one exciting aspect of **Family Reading Night** is the use of the computerized reading management program, the Accelerated Reader. During the school day, students at *(your school)* use the program to prove their comprehension of books read. Tests passed translate to reading points earned. Now other family members are getting in on the testing fun. "It's become common for

students and parents to have a little friendly competition with the Accelerated Reader," *(your name)* said.

*(At this point, you may want to credit those people who helped you plan* ***Family Reading Night,*** *including a sponsor, if any — see next paragraph for a sample write-up. You can also share any special things your school does with the night, Accelerated Reader, or other reading programs.)*

[*(Your name)* proposed the **Family Reading Night** to school administrator *(name of administrator)*, who was quick to see the advantages of the program. *(Your name)* also approached *(business name)*, owner *(owner's name)*, to help meet some of the financial requirements of staging **Family Reading Night**. "Someone has to meet expenses for opening the school, keeping the lights on, and helping with refreshments," *(your name)* said, "and we asked *(business owner's name)* to sponsor our activity. Support has been great."]

For more information about **Family Reading Night**, contact the school office or *(your name)* at *(phone number)*.

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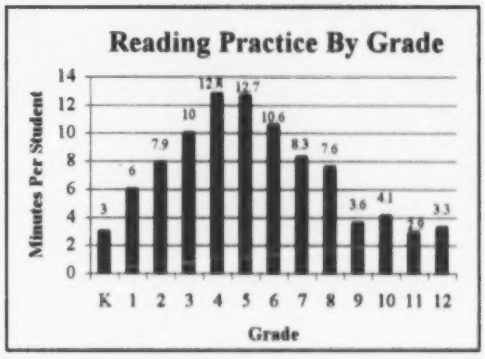


## *Latest research shows need for increased reading practice time*

A recent study of literature-based reading in K-12 schools reveals that the average high-school senior spends about as much time reading as the average kindergartner, and that students in general read on average just 7.1 minutes a day.

The study, conducted by The Institute for Academic Excellence, Inc., Madison, WI, draws on research collected from 2,193 schools and 659,214 students. In addition to demonstrating that children in most American schools don't get enough reading practice, the study shows how differences in reading practice explain differences in reading performance. Analysis of public schools versus private, size of school, and state differences are highlighted. This study, *Patterns of Reading Practice*, is FREE at your request. Just fill out the coupon below.

## *Reading Renaissance℠ seminars at convenient locations nationwide!*

Thousands of educators are implementing practical, classroom-proven techniques presented at one of two seminars offered by The Institute for Academic Excellence. To find out more about *Creating World-Class Readers*, a one-day seminar, and *Fundamentals of Reading Renaissance*, a more intensive, three-day seminar, check the seminar brochure box in the coupon below.

## *Student readers have inalienable rights!*

Are you embracing every opportunity to develop a community of readers? To help promote positive attitudes toward reading, we've developed a 10-point Reading Bill of Rights. It's the foundation of a literacy-rich environment, and a terrific aid to gaining support for your reading programs. *A Reader's Bill of Rights* is also FREE at your request (see coupon below).

## *For more information on the Accelerated Reader . . .*

The Accelerated Reader motivates students aged 6 to 18 to read more and better books, while freeing teachers from reading and grading book reports and keeping records. Students read books from the 9,600-title book list (many are books already in the collections of most school and public libraries). They then test knowledge and comprehension of the book by answering multiple-choice questions on an MS-DOS, Macintosh, or Apple II computer. The computer handles all scoring and record-keeping automatically. Teachers can generate a wide variety of class and individual performance reports, helping them to assess and motivate student reading.

The publisher of the Accelerated Reader, Advantage Learning Systems, Inc., maintains a library of free information for educators. For a FREE catalog, a brochure giving you ideas on *How to Create World-Champion Readers*, and a demo disk, simply complete this coupon and mail it to us at the address below, or call TOLL-FREE, (800) 338-4204.

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***Yes!*** *I want to motivate our students to even greater heights. Please send me the FREE materials I've indicated below.*

Name _____ Title _____
School _____
Address _____
City/State/Zip + 4 _____
School Phone _____ Home Phone _____

*Please send me:*

- ❒ Latest Accelerated Reader Catalog
- ❒ *A Reader's Bill of Rights*
- ❒ *Patterns of Reading Practice*
- ❒ Demo Disk (check format): Mac ___ MS-DOS ___ Apple ___
- ❒ Seminar Brochure
- ❒ *How to Create World-Champion Readers*